

Budget Reductions in the Department of Natural Resources

Why is the state in this budget crisis? What happened to the surplus?

Due to the national recession, Indiana has collected less tax money than needed to run the state at the level of spending authorized by the General Assembly. The entire nation has been in a financial slump since last summer. September 11 didn't help matters any.

My taxes support the DNR—why can't I get the services I want?

Every tax dollar that you pay is divided many ways to support a wide variety of state services. Only a very small percentage of each tax dollar is appropriated to the Department of Natural Resources. User fees currently pay for about half of state park and reservoir services. Tax appropriations from the State's General Fund pay the rest. Given the state's financial crisis, virtually every state agency had to make cuts in various areas. The General Fund portion of the DNR's operating budget, formerly \$54 million per year, was permanently cut by \$8.2 million. Clearly, we cannot afford to offer the same services for \$45.8 million that we could for \$54 million.

Why raise user fees AND cut services at state parks and reservoirs?

We proposed these increases because we had no choice in the matter. \$3 million was cut from State Parks and Reservoirs operating budget for Fiscal Year 2002-2003. That represents 11-12% of the total operating budget. When you lose that much of your income, you can't maintain the same services as before!

Until 2001, park and reservoir user fees had not been increased for **eight years**. Our operating budgets have increasingly depended on tax dollars. We need to reverse this trend. As we become more reliant on user fees and other income sources, our operating budgets will be more stable

and less subject to cutbacks when tax revenues fall short.

How much has the gate fee gone up?

One dollar per vehicle. Other fees are listed in the Indiana Recreation Guide, available at state properties or on-line at www.dnr.in.gov/parklake/.

A visit to a state park or reservoir is a great bargain. A family of four can hike, swim and enjoy nature exhibits and programs for much less than the cost of dinner and a movie!

Why did the hunting and fishing license fees go up so drastically?

All proceeds from fishing and hunting licenses are used to protect and manage Indiana's fish and wildlife resources. When it became clear that the DNR would not have enough money to continue this important work, we raised residents' hunting and fishing fees for the first time **in 14 years**. We raised the license price only enough to pay the cost of managing these resources.

Why/how did you choose these particular reductions/cuts?

Each DNR division contributed to the reductions in proportion to existing program responsibilities and staff. In state parks and reservoirs, each property received a target amount to cut from its operating budget. The targeted amount represents 25% of the property's budget for seasonal workers. Each site identified programs/facilities that might be closed to achieve this cut with the fewest long-term impacts. The central office approved or modified those suggestions, while trying to limit the loss of revenue and reduce the impact on geographic areas and customer groups.

Aren't you losing revenue by closing some facilities?

Yes. However, with less money from the State General Fund, we have fewer seasonal employees (25%) working this summer. Many areas depend on seasonal staff for gate

How can I express my opinions about the reductions?

- Contact your state legislator and let him/her know how much you enjoy the services and facilities of the Division of State Parks and Reservoirs or the DNR. Call 800/382-9842 (House) or 800/382-9467 (Senate), or e-mail at <http://www.IN.gov/legislative/contact/index.html>
- Fill out a comment card at a state park or reservoir.
- Watch for notice of public meetings where you can express your opinions about present and future fees.

How I can help my favorite property?

- Support our efforts to become less dependent on State General Fund dollars and more reliant on other user fees and other income sources.
- Visit often! Show your support by using and enjoying our sites!
- Donate funds to your favorite property. Each property has a donations account. Funds in this account are used only to support the programs and facilities at that individual property. The Natural Resources Foundation can accept endowments dedicated to specific properties.
- Volunteer at your favorite property (interpretive center hosts, computer data entry, trail/property cleanup/maintenance, campground host, resource management projects such as invasive plant control, the P.A.R.K.S. music program, etc.) See our website for more information on volunteer opportunities with State Parks and Reservoirs.
- Check with the property to see if they have a wish list for materials and supplies that support facilities and programming.
- When you visit our properties and have a good time, say "thanks for a good job" to our staff!

DNR

Department of Natural Resources

operation, cleaning, mowing and security. We don't have enough employees to keep all of our facilities open. Rather than reduce services throughout a property, we are reducing the number of areas we maintain so the seasonal workers we *do* hire can concentrate their efforts in areas that typically have more visitors and higher use.

How much does it cost to operate the areas where cuts were made?

Savings from program and facility reductions in state parks and reservoirs account for approximately \$1.8 million of our \$3.2 million in cuts. The remaining cuts come from reductions in mowing, equipment purchases, printing, and training, unfilled permanent staff vacancies and other operating expenses.

How long will the cuts/impacts last?

The budget reductions are permanent, unless the General Assembly chooses to restore funding when better economic times return.

You plan to charge fees for some programs. Which ones?

Small fees to help defray the cost of materials and staff time are expected for some special events and workshops. We will not charge for our regular public programming that includes hikes, talks, evening campfires and patch program.

Why do I still see some big construction projects underway if the budget is so tight?

Construction planning starts far in advance. Funding had already been allocated or construction started on some projects prior to the reductions. These include Department of Transportation funded parking and road work at Summit Lake, Brookville Lake, Indiana Dunes and Prophetstown State Park. Other projects that will continue are rehab of structures at Historic Camp Glen at Fort Harrison, construction of duplex cabins at Shakamak and Pokagon, and completion of two new interpretive centers at Mounds State Park and Salamonie Reservoir.

Are there impacts that may not be obvious "on the surface?"

- We hope to see a greater reliance on teamwork between DNR and

public to support our facilities/programs.

- Some positions may be permanently lost.
- Staff face stress in maintaining programs/facilities in a professional, customer-friendly manner.
- Scheduled maintenance of buildings may be delayed.
- New construction or renovations will be delayed.

Can lottery dollars come to DNR for support of facilities and staff?

The state statute creating the lottery

directs allocation of lottery proceeds. The DNR is not included in that statute. For more info on the lottery, go to www.hoosierlottery.com and click on "Where the money goes."

Are other states facing this issue?

Yes, almost every other state is experiencing the same problems. Some states have even closed entire parks because of budget cuts.

Other Questions?

E-mail us from our website at www.dnr.in.gov/parklake/.

What are the direct impacts of the reductions?

State Parks and Reservoirs

- Bass Lake State Beach and Campground are leased to Starke County for operation as a county park.
- The Performing Arts Program is eliminated. Volunteers are presenting some programs. Some special events are reduced in scope or eliminated.
- Campgrounds closed include: Little Turtle Campground at Huntington Lake, Salamonie Lost Bridge East Campground, Mississinewa Miami Primitive Campground, Patoka Fisherman's B Campground, and Raccoon Lake C Camping.
- During the winter, cabins are closed at Chain O'Lakes, Whitewater and Harmonie State Parks.
- The following boat ramps are not maintained: Walls, Little Patoka, Jackson, South Lick Fork and Osborn at Patoka Reservoir; Lost Bridge East and Mt. Hope at Salamonie Reservoir; Pearson's Mill at Mississinewa Reservoir; and Allen's Creek, Salt Creek, Pine Grove and Crooked Creek at Monroe Reservoir.
- The operating budget is reduced by \$3.2 million, including a cutback of nearly 25% in seasonal employees. This leaves fewer people to lead hikes, staff nature centers, mow grass, clean restrooms and public areas and perform repairs and maintenance.. Also, swimming pools are open fewer hours; the summer swimming pool season closes Aug. 14.
- The Potato Creek State Park Horseman's Camp, originally planned for closure, will remain open this year, thanks to a \$9,000 donation from the Indiana Trail Riders Association.
- Spring Mill Twin Caves boat tours, originally slated for closure, will remain open, thanks to support from the Lawrence County Tourism Commission.
- Staff training is reduced significantly.

Other Divisions

- The Wyandotte SRA swimming pool in Harrison-Crawford State Forest is closed. An undetermined number of campgrounds, picnic areas, shelterhouses and other recreation sites in state forests may close if staff or funding are not available.
- The state beekeeper inspection program is eliminated.
- The new Indiana State Museum opened with 17 fewer employees than planned.
- Wyandotte Cave Tours are transferred to a private vendor. Fees are increased.
- The scheduled conservation officers' recruit school is cancelled. Cancellation of the class will delay by one or more years hiring and training staff to fill conservation officer positions that are vacant through attrition.

All Divisions

- Fewer brochures and information items are available.
- To further save money, state agencies are not filling many job vacancies. This delays work on a variety of projects, and impacts the timeliness of responses to customer concerns.